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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine whether there is a variety of Nigerian English acceptable as a teaching model to prospective Nigerian primary school teachers of different ethnic groups. Results indicate that: (1) contrary to common belief, there are Nigerians of different ethnic groups who speak a variety of English acceptable to other Nigerians of different ethnic groups; (2) there are Nigerians of different ethnic groups who, in an interview situation, speak a type of English cutting across ethno-regional lines; and (3) there is a variety of Nigerian English that may be phonetically standard because the majority of its speakers use standard native grammar, vocabulary, and approximate standard British phonology. The findings suggest that listeners' perceptions of features of speech associated with education, economic standing, and ethno-geographic origin might be more significantly related to acceptability than ethnic group and sex, and that factors related to speech delivery, such as pleasantness and interest level, might be even more strongly related. Substantial further phonetic analysis and research on variables affecting acceptability and intelligibility are recommended. (MSE)

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LOCAL ACCEPTABILITY AS A FACTOR IN SELECTING A MODEL FOR TEACHING ESL: NIGERIAN TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD VARIETIES OF SPOKEN ENGLISH

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Background

Nigeria is one of the most populous countries in West Africa. It is also one of the most linguistically diverse. The total number of its indigenous languages was recently estimated at 394 (Hansford, Bendel-Samuel and Stanford 1976). When Nigeria became one nation, English became the lingua franca: the language of the government, the news media, the public institutions and the elite. It also became a vehicle for inter-ethnic communication and social mobility. RP (Received Pronunciation), the then standard British pronunciation taught in the public schools, was the official model for teaching English in Nigeria and the language was principally taught by native English speakers in small private and missionary schools.

In the last two decades, Nigeria has experienced rapid social, political and economic changes. The indigenous population has increased significantly. So have the standard of living, the rate of social mobility and the rate of urbanization. Public educational institutions have increased in number and the government, in an attempt to educate all citizens from the age of seven, has embarked on a policy of "Universal Primary Education". More indigenous businesses have been established and more Nigerians have been traveling outside the country for education, recreation and business. The percentage of English-speaking Nigerians has increased while, due to the process of decolonization, the percentage of native English speakers has decreased. Since independence a strong sense of nationalism and pride has understandably developed among Nigerians. Such rapid develop-

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ments in a country which is still not industrialized have inevitably led to lower standards in the quality of services provided by both public and private institutions, in which supply cannot keep up with demand. These factors cannot but have serious effects on the public schools. English language programs are experiencing a lack of qualified teachers, adequate facilities and up-to date materials. According to test reports issued by West African Examinations Council (W.A.E.C.), scores of secondary school students on English language exams have been steadily falling.

These changes have influenced the varieties of English being used in Nigeria as well as the popular attitudes toward English as a second language. The increased mobility of Nigerians has exposed them to a greater variety of spoken English accents both within and without the country. The dearth of native English speakers, coupled with a greater need for teachers in the country, has led to more exposure to standard varieties of English in the schools. Local radio and television stations have increased so much in recent years that most mass media broadcasters, the traditional vehicles for proliferation of standard speaking models outside of the schools, no longer use a standard variety of English. National pride has led to the questioning of keeping a foreign tongue such as English as the lingua franca and the motivation to acquire an English accent, particularly the "Queen's" variety, has weakened.

The local English teacher who probably has not acquired a standard variety of spoken English and, in most cases, has no desire to do so, finds it understandably difficult in helping students to acquire one.

Although the impracticality of changing the lingua franca to an indigenous one at present is clearly evident, most educators and linguists agree that some change must be made in the English language policy. Independent research suggests that a number of different varieties of English are spoken in the country but that very few Nigerians speak an intelligible and locally acceptable variety. This has led some educators (Ubahakwe 1979) to predict that, if steps are not taken to improve English language teaching soon, "Nigerian English" will become barely intelligible outside of the country. Various suggestions have been put forth but the official government policy still recognizes English as the lingua franca and requires that it be taught in Nigerian schools beginning in the third grade. Students going to college must pass a written English language exam and public school teachers must pass an oral as well as a written examination. Because of lack of adequate linguistic descriptions of Nigerian English, the oral model for these exams is still RP even though very few Nigerians are exposed to RP or have the motivation to acquire it. As such, many Nigerian educators advocate the use of a standard variety of Nigerian English as a teaching model. They also agree that such a variety needs to be locally acceptable, has to be internationally and locally intelligible, and has to adhere to certain core phonetic features which cut across regional boundaries.

Past Studies on Varieties of Nigerian English

Until recently, however, the existence of a standard variety of Nigerian English was denied by many scholars and there was little attempt to identify or describe one. The general feeling in the country was that varieties of Nigerian English were so regionally influenced by mother tongue interference that they

were unintelligible outside of the country and socially unacceptable within the country.

Most studies on Nigerian English in the past have been in the areas of error analysis and contrastive linguistics. Basically pedagogical in purpose, they have attempted to point out the learning problems experienced by Nigerians due to mother tongue interference (see Dunstan 1966 and 1968). Their contribution to the field of variety differentiation has been to identify ethno-geographical varieties of Nigerian English.

Other studies have been mainly theoretical articles based on general observations. These have attempted to classify varieties of Nigerian English according to educational level and social class of the speaker (Adeniran 1979, Banjo 1971, Brosnahan 1958). The most comprehensive article is written by Banjo (1971), in which he postulated four broad varieties of Nigerian English based on proximity to standard British English, international intelligibility and local acceptability. He suggested that one of these varieties, his number three, could be a standard because he felt that it was internationally intelligible, locally acceptable and almost identical to standard British English phonology, its principal distinguishing features being in the area of accent or surface phonetic representations.

In terms of identifying a standard model for teaching English in Nigeria, the problem with most of these studies is that none of the varieties has been linguistically quantified, described and tested for intelligibility or acceptability. The only large scale intelligibility study was done by Tiffen (1974). He tape-recorded the voices of 24 Nigerian university students from two different ethno-geographical regions and played them to 240 British listeners. Although Tiffen's study was carried out ten years ago, it is important because it is the only statistically quantifiable study on the intelligibilty of Nigerian English that has been done to date. Its findings, that the average Nigerian university student of that time was 67% as communicatively effective as a native RP speaker, suggest that most varieties of Nigerian English today may not be internationally intelligible, particularly when it is realized that the percentage of educated Nigerians is low. On the other hand, some of the informants in Tiffen's study were found to be 93% as effective as the RP speaker. This suggests that an internationally intelligible variety of Nigerian English does exist, albeit spoken by a minority.

Two small scale attitudinal studies have been done on Nigerian English. In an attempt to discover preference for accents, the first (Obanya et al. 1979) played tape-recordings of four different speakers reading a passage from a science textbook to prospective teachers at the University of Ibadan. The speakers represented four accents heard in Nigeria: native RP, standard Nigerian (i.e. no obvious regional characteristics) and two regional accents (Igbo and Yoruba) heavily flavored with mother tongue elements. Results indicated that most listeners preferred the regional accent nearest their own and that English teachers preferred either the RP or the standard Nigerian accent.

The second study (Odejide 1980) was based on a questionnaire given to students in an English phonetics class at the same university. It suggested that the students preferred a standard Nigerian accent to a native variety or a marked regional variety.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Research Questions

The present study is part of research being done on the acceptability of local varieties of Nigerian English. Its purpose is to determine whether there is a local variety of Nigerian English which is acceptable as a teaching model to prospective Nigerian primary school teachers of different ethnic groups and to identify some of its characteristics. Unlike previous studies, it is not so much concerned with preference for a particular speaking accent but with acceptability of speech in communication. Its basic assumption is that acceptability is a function of grammatical competency, accent and speech delivery.

Since most Nigerians do not obtain more than a primary school education and since spoken English is taught in all primary schools, it is felt here that a local model for teaching English should be one that is acceptable to primary school teachers. As such, this study has attempted to discuss whether there are Nigerians who use a variety of English which is acceptable to prospective primary school teachers. It has also tried to determine whether such speakers could all be classified as using the same variety of English by virtue of their speech being identified with certain socio-cultural factors by the teacher-listeners, whether there is a relationship between the acceptability of their speech and certain socio-cultural factors which have been suggested in previous articles and whether their speech can be identified with specific mother tongue characteristics. The specific research questions are:

1. Are there Nigerians on the staff of the University of Ibadan who use a variety of English which is acceptable to prospective primary school teachers?

2. If there are such speakers, can their speech be identified by certain common social/situational factors?

3. If there are such speakers, is there a relationship between their acceptability and each of the following factors:
   (a) listeners' ethnic group?
   (b) listeners' sex?
   (c) listeners' perception of speakers' ethnic group?
   (d) listeners' perception of speakers' education level?
   (e) listeners' perception of speakers' economic level?
   (f) listeners' perception of pleasantness of speakers'voice?
   (g) listeners' perception of rate of speakers' speech?
   (h) listeners' perception of interest level of speakers' speech?

4. Can the speech of the acceptable speakers be identified with features of a specific mother tongue?

To find the answers to these questions, voices of the staff members of the University of Ibadan were taped and played to prospective primary school teachers in different parts of southern Nigeria. The teachers were asked to indicate whether

they felt that the voices were acceptable as teaching models and also to describe them in terms of certain specific characteristics.

Speaker Sampling

The University of Ibadan is the largest and most established university in Nigeria. Members from its staff were chosen as the sampling population because it was felt that they would be most representative of the different ethnic groups in the country and that they would be most likely to use a variety of speech which would not only be acceptable but which would also fulfill the other criteria for a standard (i.e. intelligibility and phonetic similarity).

A list of the senior academic and administratrive staff of the university was stratified according to ethnic group. Using a table of random numbers, ten members were identified from each group making a total of 50 informants. These fifty had common demographic characteristics: most (45) were between thirty and forty-nine years of age; most (44) were lecturers; most (36) were either in science, social studies or the humanities; most (49) had spent at least one month in a native English-speaking country; most (44) said they used English more than any other language in their daily lives; most (48) resided in a multi-ethnic neighborhood.

Listener Sampling

A total of 434 final year students at three teacher training colleges in southern Nigeria listened to the tapes. This averaged 80 listeners per speaker. The colleges, one co-educational, one male and one female, were all run by the Federal Government and were located in two different ethnic areas of southern Nigeria. These areas were chosen because they were geographically the farthest apart and also represented two of the four largest ethnic groups in the country: the Yoruba of the West and the Efik-Ibibio of the East. The particular schools were chosen because they were centrally located and had populations representative of the different groups within each area. Except for ethnic group (65% Yoruba, 31% Efik-Ibibio) and sex (44.7% male, 54.3% female), the demographic characteristics of the listeners were fairly homogeneous: most (68%) were between twenty and twenty-five years of age; most (97.7%) had never travelled to native English-speaking areas; most (72.3%) had never lived in areas outside of the area where their mother tongue was spoken.

The Acceptability Tests

During the course of 30 minute interviews taped in the informants' offices, each speaker was asked to talk extemporaneously about one of the following subjects: current events, a hobby, a recent experience. Thirty-second excerpts from these monologues were transferred onto master tapes and played to the prospective teachers. Each teacher heard ten of the fifty informants two times. The first time they were asked to answer the question: "Would you accept this speaker as a model for teaching English in Nigeria?" (yes/no). The second time, they heard the same speakers in a different order and were asked to describe each voice by answering multiple choice questions about the following characteristics: ethnic origin, education,income, pleasantness of voice, rate of speech, and interest

level. To allow for practice time, each tape was preceded by the voice of a practice speaker.

Administration of the Tests

In each school, students were divided into groups of twenty-five to thirty and each group listened to a different tape. Before beginning the test, each student was asked to fill out a short questionnaire containing demographic data. The students heard the tapes in groups of ten to twenty, depending on acoustic conditions in classrooms in their schools. Before they took the test, they were told what it was about and the concept of finding a teaching model was discussed with them. A cassette battery-operated tape recorder was used and students were seated in a circle as close as possible to the recorder. Each tape began with a practice speaker, after which the recorder was stopped and questions answered about the rest of the test.

Reliability of the Tests

The researcher was particularly concerned with test reliability in terms of consistency of response. For this reason, a preliminary test, based on the test-retest method was done. One of the test tapes was played to twenty first-year college students and the questionnaires were administered to them. The procedure was carried out a week later with the same students. A comparison of the results from the two tests yielded a high .9563907 coefficient of correlation, indicating that the same speakers were likely to be consistently chosen by the same listening population.

Another concern was with control of listening environment. Since the recordings were carrried out in different localities, both the individual taped interviews and the listening rooms varied in one particular area: background noise. As far as listeners were concerned, an attempt was made to rectify this by placing them as close as possible to the recorder and cutting down on the number of listeners in each session.

To determine the amount of influence these factors may have had on the testing, two questions dealing with tape clarity and intensity were added to the listeners' questionnaires.

Results of the Tests

Research Question #1: Are there Nigerians on the staff of the University of Ibadan who speak a variety of English which is acceptable to prospective primary school teachers of different ethnic groups?

Since acceptability was defined as a "yes" answer to the question, "Do you think this speaker would make a good model for teaching English in Nigeria?", the total number of "yes" answers was found for each speaker and, since the number of listeners per speaker varied slightly (the range was from 80-94 with an average of 89), the total number of "yes" answers for a speaker was divided by the number of listeners. This yielded an index of acceptability i.e. the percentage of a given listening population that accepted a speaker.

Before the test was administered, the arbitrary percentile of 60 was chosen as the acceptability threshold for this study. This percentile was chosen because it was high enough to represent a significant majority and low enough to allow for the individual variance in attitude which might be found among untrained listeners not screened for listening competence.

Since this study was trying to identify speakers who are equally acceptable to both Efik-Ibibio and Yoruba listeners and since the number of listeners in each of these groups varied (284 Yorubas,135 Efik-Ibibios), the acceptability index for each speaker was found in each of these groups and only those speakers that were accepted by 60% or more of both groups were admitted as being acceptable across ethnic group lines.

Based on the above factors, 15 (30%) of the speakers were accepted as teaching models.

Research Question #2: Do the listeners identify the speakers with common social and situational characteristics?

For this part of the research, there was a total of 278 listeners (due to time factors in one of the schools, the students were unable to participate), each of whom heard ten of the fifty speakers. Since each of the listeners made one judgment relating to each question about each of the ten speakers, there was a total of 2780 judgments for the group of speakers as a whole. To describe the group as a whole, the judgments under each category for each question were totaled and their percentages of the total number of ratings were found. The resulting percentages represented the judgments given by the listeners to the speakers which they heard. They suggest a socio-situational description of the sampled speakers as a group as perceived by the listeners.

The fifteen acceptable speakers were then taken from the group and the same procedure was followed in order to see whether their description differed from that of the group as a whole. There was a total of 819 judgments for each question relating to this smaller group.

Table 1 gives a summary of the data collected. It suggests that the listeners perceive certain common socio-situational characteristics in the speech samples. A majority (50% or more) of the listeners' judgments characterized the acceptable speakers as being of Nigerian nationality, having a high level of education, speaking with a pleasant voice, speaking at an average rate and speaking in an interesting way. Although there was no majority judgment with respect to ethnic group and income level, more of the judgments characterized the acceptable speakers as being unidentifiable as to ethnic group and of the middle income group.

TABLE 1

Comparison of the social/situational characteristics of the acceptable speech samples with the social/situational characteristics of the group as a whole

Perceived chracteristics	Acceptable Speakers N - 819	All Speakers N - 2780
Income level		
high	28.2	27.1
medium	40.4	36.6
low	4.3	7.4
can't tell	27.1	28.9
Education level		
high	58.1	55.7
medium	27.2	27.8
low	3.8	4.2
can't tell	10.9	12.3
Ethnic group		
Edo	8.8	8.7
Efik-Ibibio	11.8	11.8
Igbo	8.9	9.3
Ijaw	6.8	6
Yoruba	22.2	20.7
can't tell	41.5	43.5
Region		
Southeast	18.3	16.5
South Midwest	16.5	14
Southwest	21.9	22
can't tell	43.3	47.5
Nationality		
Nigerian	78.6	73.3
Non-Nigerian	15.3	18.4
can't tell	6.1	8.3
Delivery		
interest		
interesting	59.9	47.2
boring	13.7	22
neither	26.4	30.8
speed		
too fast	13.4	10.2
too slow	22.6	33.1
neither	26	56.7
pleasantness		
pleasant	55.7	44.9
unpleasant	16.1	24.3
neither	28.2	30.8
Tape recording		
clarity		
clear	63.9	51.4
unclear	15.2	22.6
neither	20.9	26
intensity		
too loud	13.6	12.8
too soft	21.6	25.1
neither	64.8	62.1

N represents total number of responses.
Figures represent percents of the total N.

When the above characteristics are compared to the characteristics of the group as a whole, only slight differences can be seen in many of the categories. With respect to perceived social characteristics, the acceptable speakers were judged as being of a slightly higher educational level and a slightly higher level of income. They were also judged as being slightly more identifiable as to ethnic group and as having slightly more Nigerian characteristics than the group as a whole. Greater differences were observed in the listeners' reactions to characteristics of delivery and situational factors. In general, the group of acceptable speakers was judged to have better delivery than the speech samples as a whole. More were judged as having pleasant voices; more were judged as speaking at rates that were neither too fast nor too slow; more were judged as speaking in an interesting way.

Research Question #3: Is there a relationship between the acceptability of these speakers and certain socio-situational factors?

To answer this question, the listeners were grouped according to the factors being examined, using their answers to the yes/no question, the multiple choice questionnaire and the socio-cultural data. The number of positive or "yes" answers given in the acceptability test was computed for each group. The different groups under each characteristic were then related using the chi-square test for significance and Phi or Cramer's V for strength of relationship (Blalock 1960).

Tables 2 and 3 summarize the statistics used to explore the relationships between acceptability and socio-situational factors. No significant relationship was found between acceptability and listeners' ethnic group and sex. Significant relationships were found between listeners' perceptions of speakers' level of income, level of education, ethnic group, nationality, pleasantness of voice, rate of spceech and interest level of speech.

The relationships established under each of the following categories varied as to degree. If values of V are averaged for each of the three general categories under listeners' perception, the factors examined under speech delivery have the strongest relationship to acceptability, followed by features of the tape recordings and lastly, factors under speaker's socio-geographical background.

TABLE 2
Relationship between acceptability and characteristics in listeners background

Listeners' background	χ^2	Critical value at .05
Ethnic group	.3275	3.841
Sex	.2941	3.841

TABLE 3
Relationship between acceptability and listener's perceptions

Listener's perceptions	χ^2	Critical value at .05	V	Average V
Speakers' Background				
Income	42.7197	7.815	.124	
Education	107.1916	7.815	.1964	
Ethnic group	26.2718	11.070	.0972	.13908
Nationality	99.946	5.991	.1896	
Region	21.6062	7.815	.0882	
Speech Delivery				
Rate	23.556	5.991	.092	
Pleasantness	140.596	5.991	.225	.1815
Interest	143.9775	5.991	.2276	
External Factors				
Clarity	142.098	5.991	.266	.1475
Intensity	13.097	5.991	.69	

A ranked comparison of each factor examined under the three general categories (table 4) shows that the strongest relationship was between acceptability and interest level of speech and that the weakest was between acceptability and intensity of speech.

TABLE 4
Ranked comparison of the relationship between perceptions of listeners and acceptability based on values of V

Perceived characteristic	V
Interest level	.2276
Tape clarity	.2260
Pleasantness	.2250
Educational level	.1964
Nationality	.1896
Income level	.1240
Ethnic group	.0972
Rate of speech	.0920
Region	.0882
Tape intensity	.0690

It is important to note that the values of V are all fairly low. This indicates that none of the established relationships were very strong when considered individually.

Research Question #4: Can the speech of the acceptable speakers be identified as to specific mother tongue interference?

Although detailed phonetic description might indicate features from particular indigenous languages in the speech samples, this study was mainly concerned with impressionistic perceptions of listeners from the language community. In

order to ensure that such listeners had been exposed to different varieties of English, eighty University of Ibadan students enrolled in an English language course which dealt with variety differentiation listened to the tapes and tried to determine the ethnic origin of the speakers.

Table 5 shows the number of students that were able to identify the ethnic group and their percent out of the total number of listeners. It indicates that, except for three speakers, 70% or more of the listeners were unable to identify the speaker's ethnic group.

TABLE 5
Percent of listeners who were able to identify the ethnic group of speaker

Speaker	Number of listeners	Percent N = 80
1	72	90
2	59	73.8
3	25	31.3
4	8	10
5	11	14
6	7	.9
7	6	.8
8	8	10
9	3	4
10	4	5
11	14	18
12	4	5
13	43	54
14	12	15
15	13	16

Impressionistic observations indicate that the speech of the fifteen acceptable speakers is almost identical to that of standard British English in terms of grammar and vocabulary. In the area of phonology, the speakers appear to use the same basic system as standard British English but differ with respect to certain phonetic features, most particularly the centralizing diphthongs, patterns of pitch, and rhythm.

Conclusions and Implications

Much more research needs to be done in order to define a local model for use in teaching English in Nigeria. Detailed phonetic analysis must be carried out in order to more accurately describe the speech of acceptable speakers. Acceptable speakers need to be tested for intelligibility and wider speaker and listener sampling needs to be done in order to determine whether the same speakers are acceptable to other socio-economic groups and whether speakers from other socio-economic groups are acceptable. More controlled speaker selection is also necessary in order to cut down on the number of variables that might influence acceptability and the terminology and type of questions used in this study need to be refined.

Nevertheless, with respect to the identification of a variety of Nigerian En-

glish which might be used as a teaching model in the country, this study has some interesting implications. It has shown, first of all, that there are Nigerians of different ethnic groups who speak a variety of English which is acceptable to other Nigerians of different ethnic groups. This belies one of the commonly held opinions that varieties of Nigerian English are so heavily influenced by the mother tongue that they are not acceptable outside of the immediate locality.

Secondly, it was suggested that there are Nigerians of different ethnic groups who speak a type of English in an interview situation which can be classified as one variety of Nigerian English because it is identified with certain features which appear to cut across ethno-regional lines by the language community.

Thirdly, it was suggested that there is a variety of Nigerian English which may be standard in terms of phonetic features because the majority of its speakers cannot be identified as having particular ethnic traits in their speech by other members of the language community and, on the basis of impressionistic linguistic description, its speakers use the same grammar and vocabulary as native speakers of standard English and appear to approximate the phonology of standard British English in many respects. Although the variety still needs to be tested for intelligibility and more phonetic analysis needs to be done, this lends credence to Banjo's (1971) contention that there is a standard Nigerian English which could serve as a model for English teaching.

This study has also suggested that there are connections between acceptability and other socio-situational factors in Nigerian culture. Disagreeing with Obanya's findings mentioned earlier (Obanya 1979), it suggests that listeners' ethnic group and sex may not always be significantly related to acceptability. Instead, its findings indicate that listeners' perceptions of certain features associated with education, economic standing and ethno-geographic procedence might be more significantly related to acceptability and that factors related to speech delivery may be even more strongly related.

The fact that three of the acceptable speakers could be identified as to ethnic origin by more than 50% of the listeners, however, suggests that an acceptable variety of Nigerian English may not necessarily be one that is entirely devoid of particular mother tongue interference. The findings suggest, in fact, that more significantly related to acceptability than any of the other factors is speaker's delivery, particularly the pleasantness of his voice and the interest level of his speech.

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